



State Police, Attorney General: Beware of Scams after Storms

Scam Artists Seek Out Disaster Survivors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Michigan State Police and Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette today urged residents affected by Monday's severe storms to be alert for scam artists using new and old tricks to obtain vital information or take advantage of disaster-weary survivors.

Residents should be cautious of door-to-door solicitors who hand out flyers and promise to speed up the insurance or contracting process and those who ask for large cash deposits or advance payments in full. Scam artists are often transients who will move quickly into a troubled area, target those perceived as vulnerable or in need of assistance and leave town without fulfilling services.

"Sadly, bad actors use times of tragedy and difficulty to prey on victims," Schuette said. "It's important for those in the areas affected by yesterday's storms to keep a watchful eye out for less than honest individuals attempting to take advantage of those in need of assistance."

Consider the following when hiring a contractor after a disaster:

- Ask to see state or local permits or licenses. Go to www.michigan.gov/bcclicense and www.michigan.gov/statelicensesearch to verify state license information.
- Hire known and recommended repair companies.
- Get at least three estimates from different companies.
- Get all agreements in writing that state exactly what work will be done.
- Make a full payment only when terms of the contract are met.

Individuals are also encouraged to be careful when being solicited for services by phone or email. If the deal being offered is too good to be true, it is probably fraudulent.

"When contracting services after an emergency or disaster, you need to be cautious not to be taken advantage of by scam artists," said Capt. Chris A. Kelenske, Deputy State Director of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and commander of the Michigan State Police, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division (MSP/EMHSD). "Unfortunately, natural disasters often bring out con artists, scammers and those looking to make a quick buck by taking advantage of disaster survivors and others willing to help."

Price Gouging

Under the Michigan Consumer Protection Act, a retailer may not charge a price that is "grossly in excess of the price at which similar property or services are sold." Consumers should be aware of prices and report any business that appears to be charging grossly excessive prices for necessary supplies, such as water, ice, plywood, gas and generators.

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If consumers are concerned that a retailer may be engaging in behavior that violates the Consumer Protection Act, they are encouraged to contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-765-8388 or file an online complaint at www.michigan.gov/agcomplaints.

Charity Scams

Charities often form to help those affected after a disaster. While the public is encouraged to donate to charities, be sure that the charity is worthy. In response to a disaster, bogus charities are often created in an attempt to profit from the generosity of the public.

Consider the following before donating:

- DO NOT give cash.
- Make out a check or money order to the organization, not the individual collecting for the organization.
- Be wary of excessive pressure for on-the-spot donations.
- DO NOT hesitate to ask for written information about the charity and be wary of charities that play on emotions towards the victims and fail to provide information concerning what they do.
- DO NOT respond to unsolicited (spam) email containing information about charities and donations.
- Research the organization and their purpose using the Internet.
- DO NOT provide personal or financial information to anyone soliciting contributions.
- Call the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Section at (517) 373-1152 to inquire about a charity or check out information that a charity has provided to you.
- Check on an organization's license and learn more about charities and the laws they must follow by visiting www.michigan.gov/agcharitysearch.

For more information and tips to help you give wisely, go to the Michigan Attorney General's website at www.michigan.gov/agcharities. Individuals needing assistance or guidance should contact their local emergency management agency or call 2-1-1.

Personnel with the MSP/EMHSD will continue to monitor the situation and take prudent action should conditions warrant. For the latest updates, follow the MSP/EMHSD on Twitter at [@MichEMHS](https://twitter.com/MichEMHS).

To learn more about being prepared before, during and after severe weather, go to www.michigan.gov/beprepared.

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The Michigan State Police, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division is responsible for coordinating state and federal resources to assist local government in response and relief activities in the event of an emergency or disaster, as well as coordinating homeland security initiatives and various federal grants.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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